1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

Wood Resources

To Hotu-matua, who first settled the island, tradition attributes the introduction of all the species of flora of economic use. Among them is the following list of trees, enumerated in the native version of the legend given to me by Tepano: ***mahute, hauhau, toro-miro, naunau, marikuru.*** With the exception of the paper mulberry it is possible that some of them "belonged to the original flora and that the natives who were acquainted with their useful qualities started to propagate them" (208, vol. 2, p. 77). From this list it is clear that the Easter Islanders did not lack wood necessary for the development of their culture, though many writers assume as much in order to increase the mystery of the island. Therefore I consider it extremely important to give the opinion of a prominent botanist, Dr. Carl Skottsberg (208, vol. 2, p. 402):

> . . . And I have been led to believe that some kind of forest once existed in Easter Island, formed by Sophora; and other species, exterminated long ago, may also have occurred. No native tradition tells us anything about these forests, but we can safely conclude that the *toromiro* must have been plentiful. The natives used much wood, not only for the construction of canoes, paddle oars, frame work for their houses and some other necessary things, but they also manufactured small wooden statues and many other ornaments famous for their artistic value, and these must have existed by thousands. The *toromiro* is a small tree, and with a population once amounting to several thousands the supply became exhausted. Cultivated fields and enclosures spread all over the place, crowding out the indigenous vegetation. Paper mulberry, *Cordyline, Sapindus,* bananas, cane, taro, sweet potato, etc. were introduced by the natives, and some weeds accompanied them. Many more have been introduced later, when communications with Tahiti and Chile were established; some have become naturalized and form an important feature in the present-day grassland.

Among the trees introduced in the last 60 years, the most common are the *miro-tahiti,* the Eucalyptus, the fig, and the orange. In the gardens of the English residence at Mataveri grow a great many imported plants and new ones are continually being acclimated. The islanders use much wood for the curios that they exchange for clothes and other supplies. Therefore they do not hesitate to destroy a tree to transform it into a score of wooden images. Indeed their destructiveness has become such a nuisance that, outside the residence of the managers, the English company has planted Eucalyptus, the wood of which cannot be carved.

The natives of old used not only the trees growing on the land for the wood they needed but also driftwood which was greatly appreciated. There is a tale of a marvelous tree which landed on the island, sent by the spirit of a man to his son. The arrival of the tree caused great excitement nearly resulting in a fight between groups of islanders, all eager to make precious ornaments from it. (See p. 376.)

Analyses of the wood in some of the scripture tablets and wooden images reveal the use of much *Podocarpus latifolia* and of *Dammara australis,* trees

1: Metraux E-5 (1934-1935) 1940
OY2 Easter Islanders OY2

137 313 endemic to New Zealand and Australia. If the tablets are really old, the wood of which they are made must have drifted to the island. Cook (53, vol. 1, p. 293) observed in a canoe "a board six or eight feet long, fourteen inches broad at one end, and eight at the other." He supposes that this large piece of wood had been left there by the Spaniards under Gonzalez or had drifted from some distant island. The driftwood I saw at Anakena and on the south coast was generally in the form of planks from ships.

435 However, wood on Easter Island in ancient times was not abundant; the natives valued it highly, and made their most precious ornaments of wood. Even today the islanders do not despise the least plank. The eagerness to get wood from passing ships is well illustrated by the account of Du Petit-Thouars (65, vol. 2, p. 227):

> All the natives repeated frequently and with vivacity the word *miro* and they showed impatience that we did not understand it: this word is used for the wood with which the Polynesians build their canoes. Wood was the thing they longed for most eagerly and they resorted to various means in order to make themselves understood; they refused to eat or to drink, they seemed to make light of the knives and of the scissors.

192 824 The parts of a tree are *tumu* (trunk or stump), *tahito* (base of the trunk), *mouga* (branches), *hua* (buds and flowers), *karu* (seeds), *rau* (leaves).

TORO-MIRO

137 The first travelers to Easter Island were impressed by the total lack of wood large enough to be used in transportation of the huge statues. The members of the expedition led by Gonzalez (90, p. 101) marvel that "not a single tree is to be found capable of furnishing a plank so much as six inches in width." They notice that "there are plenty of shrubs, or brushwood of a sort little more than an estada in height, which offer little obstruction to one passing as they are not dense and have no prickles. Its trees are very similar to mimosas and tamarinds." This tree is the *toro-miro* (*Sophora toromiro*) of which Cook (53, vol. 1, p. 285) gives a nearly identical description: "The wood is of reddish color, and pretty hard and heavy, but very crooked, small and short, not exceeding six or seven feet in height." G. Forster (82, vol. 1, p. 591) saw a hill near Hanga-roa "That was covered with a shrubbery of the mimosa, which grew here to the height of eight or nine feet, and some of whose stems near the root were about the thickness of a man's thigh." Cook (53, vol. 1, p. 285) in 1776 and De Langle (130, vol. 1, p. 82) in 1786 saw only a few small shrubs of *toro-miro* along the south coast.

From the preceding descriptions it is obvious that *toro-miro* were not numerous on the east and southeast coasts. Gonzalez (90, p. 90) reports that on the north coast the soil seemed "to be covered for the most part with green shrub."

Roussel (190, p. 427), one of the earliest missionaries, mentions thickets of *toro-miro* and *hau* on the outer slope of Rano-kao. Palmer (169, p. 375), who visited the island in 1868, says, "At present there are no trees on the island [all that there were having been destroyed in wars]; there are a few shrubs, as the paper mulberry (*miromiro*) and a kind of pourow-tree (the hibiscus)." Palmer (168, p. 276) says: "As for trees, I cannot call the shrubs and bushes I saw by that name. There are none now, though, from the boles and roots found in some places, they must have existed." Three years later, Gana (86, p. 23) saw clumps of *toro-miro*, some of which were 20 inches in diameter. "There is not a single trunk left, but branches are still used in the construction of huts and for the shafts of war spears." In another record (86, p. 7) Gana speaks of "innumerable dry trunks, from